

## ADOT: No freeway decisions expected in '08

[By Doug Murphy | AFN](#)

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Local residents, whether they support or oppose the South Mountain Loop 202 Freeway, can stop sitting on the edge of their seats.

According to Arizona Department of Transportation spokesman Tim Tait, no one expects a draft environmental impact report to receive an OK from the federal government any time this year.

Once the draft report is approved and laid out for the public to review there will then be more months, perhaps years, of rewriting before a "build" or "no build" recommendation is accepted.

If approved, construction from Interstate 10 and Loop 202 in Ahwatukee Foothills, then west and north to reconnect with I-10 around 55th Avenue, will take 24 to 30 months to design before the first dirt gets moved, and five to six years for construction once the equipment gets rolling, according to engineers.

The current delay with the draft report revolves around defining culturally important sites in the path of the 10-lane freeway, including several ridges in South Mountain Park that ADOT will need to blast through, which Gila River Indian Community members say are culturally significant.

Last week, during a South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team meeting, several team members questioned how carefully engineers have looked at other impacts the freeway would have on South Mountain and the plants and animals that live there.

"I won't say the report is wrong, but it down plays South Mountain," said Mike Goodman, a member of the advisory team representing the Phoenix Mountain Preserve Council.

Heidi Fischer, representing the Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee, asked about what would be done to minimize the impact of light pollution on animals, which acts like a solid wall in preventing nocturnal animals from moving around.

Engineering staff was caught off-guard by the question, but Tait quickly said that ADOT wants to minimize freeway impacts while keeping them safe and that the state would look at what could be done to reduce the impact of lights on wildlife.

The South Mountain Loop 202 was first planned in 1985 but money woes prevented its construction. In 2002, ADOT formed the advisory team when it decided to update the old plan to take into account growth and development on the ground.

Supporters of the plan have bristled at the glacial pace of the environmental impact study, pointing out that the freeway has been on the books for two decades and should be built.

Opponents say the original six-lane freeway has been expanded to 10 lanes, which means more homes than expected will have to be demolished, and that with all the growth and development in the area the freeway should be built somewhere other than along Pecos Road.